

Appendix N: Frequently Asked Questions

March 22, 2004

General

What is the Reading First program?

Reading First is a federal grant program with the purpose of ensuring all children learn to read well by the end of third grade. In order to receive over \$130 million per year for six years, California developed a Reading First Plan that was approved by a panel of reading experts for the United States Department of Education (USDE). California's Reading First Plan ensures that all the necessary components to improve reading instruction are available to California's highest need K-3 classrooms. These components include scientifically researched and standards based instructional materials, teachers trained to use these materials, principals knowledgeable in reading instruction able to support the teachers, and classroom assessments geared to the instructional program that allow the teacher to monitor and improve student achievement of reading skills.

Is the Reading First Program only a professional development program?

While teacher and principal professional development is an important element of California's Reading First Program, the Reading First Program is much more than that. As required by federal law, California's Reading First Program is a comprehensive K-3 program built around California's standards based adopted reading instructional materials that utilizes the five essential components of effective reading instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary development, reading fluency, and reading comprehension strategies). The Reading First program will allow schools serving low achieving, low income K-3 students to simultaneously have scientifically researched based instructional materials, teachers and principals trained to use those materials, scientifically researched based assessments aligned to the instructional materials, and time and expert resources (reading coaches, content experts, district and state technical assistance) to focus this instruction on the needs of individual students.

Is this a one-year or multi-year sub-grant?

Once approved, the Reading First sub-grant amount will be annually awarded to the LEA for three years, contingent on continued federal funding. Also, if an LEA is not making substantial progress in improving student reading achievement and implementing the program, funding may be discontinued before three years. The State Board of Education, on advice of the Reading and Literacy Partnership Team, will define "substantial progress" within the next year.

Why is it called a sub-grant?

The State of California received a "Reading First Grant" from the USDE. When the state allocates the grant to LEAs it becomes a "sub-grant."

Eligibility

What local educational agencies (LEAs) are eligible for Reading First Grants?

As required under federal law, California's approved Reading First Plan targets local education agencies (LEAs) with the highest need. Eligibility is therefore limited to LEAs serving grades K-3 which have one thousand or more, or 40 percent or more, of their second and third graders scoring in categories "below basic" and "far below basic" in reading on the California Standards Test, and that meet one of the following criteria:

- The LEA has jurisdiction over an area designated as an empowerment zone or an enterprise community; OR
- The LEA has two or more Program Improvement schools under Title I, Part A, or 25 percent of its schools identified for Program Improvement under Title I, Part A; OR
- The LEA has 2,000 or more students, or 60 percent of students counted for allocation of Title I, Part A, funding.

A listing of the LEAs meeting the above criteria, and therefore eligible for the Reading First Program is available on the California Department of Education (CDE) Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ca/rl/>.

What should I do if I think my LEA meets the criteria, but is not included in the List of Eligible LEAs?

Before submitting an application, please contact Kathie Scott in the California Department of Education at (916) 323-4711 or kscott@cde.ca.gov to discuss why you believe your LEA is eligible.

Are all schools in an eligible LEA eligible for the program?

No. To be an eligible school within an eligible LEA, a school must have 40% or more of its second and third graders scoring in categories "below basic" and "far below basic" in reading on the California Standards Test, and be a program improvement school or have 50 percent or more of its students counted for allocation of Title I, Part A, funding.

Is there a list of eligible schools that meet the above criteria?

Yes. It is on the Reading First Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/ca/rl/>.

Can a school that meets the criteria apply on its own?

No. The Reading First program requires school districts to be involved and support each school's' reading instruction program. Therefore, the school district must apply.

Can a charter school apply?

If they meet all the Reading First eligibility requirements, independent charter schools can apply as an LEA and non-independent charter schools can be a school on their chartering district's application.

Can an LEA just pick the schools to participate or does each school have to agree to participate?

LEAs are encouraged to work with the eligible selected schools in developing their application in order to ensure that each school understands the program and has had an opportunity to offer input to modify the program to meet individual site needs. The principal of each school will also need to sign the site assurances to indicate that the school will accomplish all the required program components.

Why must LEAs apply for a specific number of schools? Can the number of schools in an LEA's application deviate from this number?

In order to ensure that enough schools are in the program to work with the school district and focus efforts on improving the reading program, the Reading First program will fund half to three-quarters of the eligible schools in each qualifying LEA. If an LEA has a reason for including fewer than half of the eligible schools, they may propose including less schools in their application, but to be approved, they must explain how the Reading First program will have a large enough presence in the district to ensure that it receives the attention it needs to improve student achievement in reading.

How is the number of funded schools calculated if three-quarters of the eligible schools is not a whole number?

To determine the number of funded schools an LEA may round up to the nearest whole number, if rounding is required.

Must the schools listed on the LEA's application already be using the required state-adopted reading instructional materials in their K-3 classrooms before the LEA can apply?

No, but the required instructional materials must be in the Reading First K-3 classrooms at the start of that school year e.g. in traditional calendar schools September 2004, for subgrants beginning in the school year 2004/05.

Must all K-3 classrooms at the school have the required state-adopted reading instructional materials?

Yes.

Do the approved alternate format Spanish translations qualify as the "required" state-adopted reading instructional materials for Ed Code Section 310 waiver classrooms?

Yes.

Will there be funds available to award new sub-grants in the future?

During the first three years of this program federal funding has increased every year. If federal funding continues to increase, it is likely that additional grant competitions will be held.

Funding

Why is there a range in the amount of funding per K-3 teacher in this program?

While the sub-grants are basically calculated as a per K-3 teacher amount, many of the costs associated with the program are not classroom based. Principal training, K-12 special education teachers' professional development, Reading Coaches and Content Experts, district technical assistance and evaluation, and services to eligible private schools are also costs associated with this program. It is anticipated that the program can be accomplished with a base grant amount of \$6,500 per K-3 teacher. Depending on the size of schools or the LEA, the number of special education teachers (who are not included in the teacher count for determining the size of the sub-grant) and the use of Reading Coaches and Content Experts, the \$6,500 level may not be sufficient and therefore an upper range of \$8,000 per K-3 teacher is allowed if additional justification is provided. Sub-grant applications seeking a sub-grant above the \$6,500 per K-3 teacher level will also be subjected to a second level of review during which both the CDE and California Department of Finance will have to agree that the higher amount is justified. The additional justification and second level of review are not required if the total amount of the grant is less than the minimum grant amount.

What are some guidelines for requesting funding above the \$6,500 per K-3 teacher level?

All requests for funding over the \$6,500 level must be reviewed and approved by both the California Department of Education and the Department of Finance. The Department of Finance takes the view that Reading First programs can be adequately implemented for \$6,500 per teacher, so your rationale should be very specific as to the need for funding at a higher level. It should fully explain why additional funding is needed to implement explicit aspects of the district's Reading First program. These may include, among other reasons, the need for additional sets of instructional materials in a second language for Section 310 waiver classrooms, the need to support private school participation, the need to provide professional development to large numbers of K-12 special education teachers, or special circumstances that require exceeding the recommended ratios of coaches and content experts. In general, rationales that include salaries for reading coaches that exceed \$60,000 per year, training expenses that exceed \$1,750 per teacher for stipends and training, ratios for reading coaches and content experts that exceed the recommended ratios, or expenses that do not directly support program implementation, are not accepted for additional funding beyond the \$6,500 level. This is not to say that districts are precluded from implementing some of these program costs, it means that they are not sufficient as a rationale for additional funding.

What is the minimum sub-grant based on Title I?

Federal law requires that each LEA that receives a sub-grant must receive at least the same percentage of the state's total Reading First sub-grant funds as the LEA received of the total Title I, Part A, funds received by all LEAs in the state for the preceding fiscal

year. That minimum sub-grant amount has been calculated and is included on the list of eligible LEAs that can be found on CDE's Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/readfirst>

What are allowable expenditures under the Reading First Program?

Federal law allows Reading First funds to be expended on reading assessments, scientifically based reading programs, instructional materials, professional development, evaluation strategies, reporting and access to reading materials. California's approved plan focuses these uses on supporting and fully implementing the state-adopted reading program. The reason California's plan was written and approved with this focus is that the Reading First program holds states accountable for ensuring that any expenditure of Reading First money by an LEA is spent on scientifically researched based materials and activities. Since California's adopted reading programs are scientifically researched and LEA Level Assurances require full implementation, expenses for state oversight are minimal and therefore leave more funding for LEAs to improve reading instruction.

Each applicant LEA will need to first budget sub-grant funds to support the activities they are assuring the state they will conduct (Please see LEA Level Assurances and School Site Assurances in the sub-grant application). Each Reading First LEA will conduct these activities in accordance with their application, once approved. Funding will also need to be budgeted to support the LEA's (1) three-year professional development plan in reading for teachers and principals, (2) three-year classroom reading assessment plan, (3) three-year evaluation plan, and (4) plan to provide monitoring and support of the Reading First teachers so that instruction will ensure that all students are reading well by the end of third grade.

For Education Section 310 waiver classrooms that are providing instruction in Spanish, it is allowable to purchase a second set of adopted materials in the other language to be used for instruction in the classroom. Thus, for classrooms that already have sets of Spanish materials, funding may be used to purchase the English version of the materials to help promote transfer to English reading by the end of third grade. Conversely, if the Section 310 classrooms have English materials but do not yet have Spanish instructional materials, those may be purchased with Reading First funds.

Are non-public school students eligible to participate in Reading First?

Yes, provided they attend a private school that meets the following eligibility requirements: (1) the private school is located in the attendance area of a participating public school, (2) the private school is using one of the state-adopted reading/language arts instructional programs for grades K-3 (Note-this does not have to be the same as that adopted by the district). Private schools that meet these criteria may receive *services* through the district's Reading First Program but not *funds*. In addition, if the services to be provided extend beyond professional development, (3) the private school must use or agree to use the assessments in the instructional materials, and select assessments from the Recommended List of Assessments, and (4) provide yearly data about the performance of students in grade three on a nationally-normed assessment in English Language Arts.

Applicants must consult with eligible private schools prior to submitting a sub-grant application. This consultation should be documented in Appendix L. If there are no eligible private schools in the district, applicants should still submit Appendix L and write “N/A” on the form.

Are students enrolled in Education Code Section 310 classrooms (Proposition 227 waiver classrooms) eligible to participate in Reading First?

Yes. The passage of AB 1485, effective January 1, 2004, assured that students enrolled in alternative programs authorized in Ed Code Section 310 may participate in Reading First. These classrooms must use one of the approved alternate format instructional materials, Houghton Mifflin *Lectura*, grades K-6, 2003 or *Foro abierto para la lectura*, grades K-6, 2003. These classes may also use, if they choose, the approved programs in English, Houghton Mifflin Reading or SRA/McGraw Hill Open Court Reading. Assessments must be selected from Appendix K: *Recommended List of Assessments for California’s Reading First LEAs*. While program and unit assessments may be conducted in the primary language, in second and third grade students will take the STAR English-Language Arts California Standards Test in English in order to monitor that all students will attain the Reading First goal of reading at the proficient level in English by the end of third grade.

Professional Development

How does Reading First relate to the Mathematics and Reading Professional Development Program (AB 466)?

Because AB 466 is a professional development program that is centered on the use of state adopted reading materials, it has been incorporated into the Reading First Program.

Additionally, because the Reading First sub-grant provides funding to support each Reading First teacher to participate in AB 466 reading training the initial year they teach reading in a Reading First classroom, LEAs are prohibited from claiming for AB 466 reading funding for those teachers. Please remember that LEAs can be approved to be AB 466 providers. Please also remember that the second and third year professional development must build on the AB 466 professional development program, but need not be delivered through an approved AB 466 provider.

Is a Reading First School prohibited from claiming AB 466 reading funding?

No, the school is not prohibited from participating in the reading portion of the AB 466 program with its non-Reading First teachers, but a school may not claim AB 466 reading funding for the K-3 teachers' professional development in reading because that professional development has already been paid for by the Reading First program. The school may also participate in the mathematics portion of the AB 466 program and receive AB 466 funding.

Must the LEAs Reading First plan include professional development in reading for the K-12 special education teachers?

While Reading First funds cannot be used in special education classrooms, Reading First funds are intended to provide professional development in reading for K-12 special education teachers and LEAs should include provision for such professional development in their plans.

It is not required that each special education student have the adopted reading intervention materials for the LEA to participate in the Reading First Program, but the training provided to the K-12 special education teachers must be on these state adopted instructional materials.

If my K-3 teachers have already received training in reading under the AB 466 program, do they need to do it again for Reading First?

No. As long as each Reading First teacher has been trained through an approved AB 466 program on the state adopted reading instructional materials used in their classroom, they don't need to take the training again. They do, however, need to receive professional development each year that focuses on the adopted instructional materials and builds on the professional development of the prior year.

Assessment

Why are LEAs limited to the "State Recommended List of Assessments"?

The federal Reading First program requires states to ensure that no Reading First funds are used on assessments unless they are proven valid and reliable and scientifically research based. To be useful to California teachers these assessments must also align to the state-adopted reading program. Rather than have every LEA incur the expense of trying to determine what assessments meet the above criteria, the recommended federal list was reviewed and those assessments that matched California's Framework assessment matrix were placed on the recommended list of qualifying assessments for LEAs implementing the adopted reading instruction program.

Can we use a more recent version of an assessment on the recommended list or a new assessment that wasn't available when the list was generated?

For purposes of the sub-grant application, LEAs should select from the State Recommended List. The list will continue to be updated based on the federal requirements through the Technical Assistance Centers.

Evaluation

Must the LEA evaluation be conducted by an outside evaluator rather than by the LEA staff?

No. The primary purpose of the LEA evaluation is to provide feedback to the LEA to ensure that the Reading First program stays on track and accomplishes its purpose.

Depending on the size and expertise of the LEA staff, this can be accomplished either by specified LEA staff, or if need be, an outside evaluator. The LEA evaluation will also be required to provide specified information for the state and federal evaluation, but, that too, can be accomplished by either specified LEA staff or by an outside evaluator.

Selection of Sub-grant Recipients

How will sub-grant recipients be selected?

First, all applications will be screened for completeness and adherence to the format requirements. Incomplete applications will not be scored. Next, applications will be checked for LEA and school(s) Certification of Assurances. Through this Certification of Assurances the LEA and participating schools will be held accountable to fully implement California's adopted scientifically research based reading instructional program, the AB 466 reading professional development for teachers and AB 75 principal training in reading, and instructional leadership and support.

In order to be funded, an eligible LEA will also need to receive a passing score on each of the Competitive Questions. A passing score will be awarded if the response to the competitive question "Meets Criteria" on the scoring rubric included in the LEA Sub-grant application.

Once an application receives a passing score on each of the twelve Competitive Questions, indicating that it is eligible for funding, priority for funding from the remaining \$13.6 million of increased Reading First funds in 2003-2004 will be given to those applications with one or more eligible schools operating one or more classrooms pursuant to Education Code section 310 (Proposition 227 waiver classrooms). (See the following two sections for additional information on priorities for funding.)

In addition, applications receiving a passing score will be reviewed to determine if they are eligible to receive priority points for low-income students or the use of reading coaches. After the awarding of priority points the applications will be ranked according to score and will be funded from high to low until no funds remain, or all the passing applications have been funded.

How will Section 310 waiver classrooms receive priority?

As required by the passage of AB 1485, effective January 1, 2004, once an application receives a passing score on each of the twelve Competitive Questions, indicating that it is eligible for funding, priority for funding from the remaining \$13.6 million of increased Reading First funds in 2003-2004 will be given to those applications with one or more eligible schools operating one or more classrooms pursuant to Education Code section 310 (Proposition 227 waiver classrooms). This means that applications with Education Code section 310 classrooms will be funded before applications without Education Code section 310 classrooms from what remains of the \$13.6 million after the first

priority Education Code section 310 classrooms are funded. If all eligible applications with Education Code section 310 classrooms are not funded when the \$13.6 million is exhausted, those applications will be included with the applications without Education Code section 310 classrooms and ranked according to score. Applying this funding priority after an application receives a passing score ensures that the application at least meets the minimum qualifications for success.

Section 310 classrooms must meet all of the program requirements detailed in the revised California Reading First Plan, including full implementation of an approved translation of a state-adopted instructional reading program (Please see Appendix C: *Identification of Reading/Language Arts Instructional Program* for a list of approved translations of a state-adopted instructional reading program). Assessments must be selected from Appendix K: *Recommended List of Assessments for California's Reading First LEAs*. While program assessments (included in the instructional materials) and year-end assessments (provided by C-TAC) may be conducted in the primary language, in second and third grade students will take the STAR English-Language Arts California Standards Test in English in order to monitor that all students will attain the Reading First goal of reading at the proficient level in English by the end of third grade.

Are additional points given for serving low-income students and/or including reading coaches and content experts in their plan?

Yes. Additional points will be awarded to each passing application that serves specified low-income populations (15 points) and/or uses a specified level of reading coaches and content experts (15 points).

Reading coaches are defined as certificated teachers who work with classroom teachers (not directly with students) in assisting with full implementation of the state-adopted reading instructional program. Content experts are defined as persons hired to train and support the reading coaches. To receive the 15 priority points, the application must include at least one reading coach for every thirty K-3 teachers and at least one content expert for every fifteen reading coaches.

An additional 15 points will also be awarded to each passing application serving low-income students where the applicant LEA meets at least one of the following criteria:

- 1) At least fifteen percent of the students served by the LEA are from families with incomes below the poverty line; or
- 2) At least 6,500 children served by the LEA are from families with incomes below the poverty line.

Technical Assistance for Eligible LEAs

What technical assistance services will be available to LEAs applying for the Sub-grant?

The following persons or organizations can assist LEAs in preparing the Round Three Application: the California Department of Education for addressing the instructions in

Sections I – III on certifications and fiscal responsibilities; and the California Technical Assistance Center and the Regional Technical Assistance Centers for answering questions related to the Competitive Questions.

Contact persons: California Department of Education
Professional Development and Curriculum Support Division
Reading/Language Arts Leadership Office
Jeffrey Cohen, Consultant
1430 “N” Street
Sacramento, California 95814
(916) 323-4629 jcohen@cde.ca.gov

California Reading Development Center
Technical Assistance Services
Irma Hernandez-Larin, Director
Sacramento County Office of Education
9738 Lincoln Village Drive
Sacramento, California 95827
(916) 228-2518 Fax (916) 228-2444 ihernand@scoe.net

A list of Regional Technical Assistance Centers is available in Appendix M.

What technical assistance services will be available to LEAs awarded the Sub-grant?

Technical assistance will be provided through the California Technical Assistance Center (C-TAC) and the Regional Technical Assistance Centers (R-TACs) [referred to throughout this application as the Technical Assistance Centers]. These centers are currently situated in nine county offices of education serving all eleven regions. LEAs are invited to use these free services for help in implementing programs if a grant is received. Grant recipients may choose to contract with other technical assistance providers at their own expense.

The services provided by these Centers will be delivered by knowledgeable and experienced staff in order to respond to the LEAs’ requests for assistance with the key components of their respective Reading First Plans. For example, an LEA may request assistance on such items as:

- ☒ How to fully implement a scientifically-research based reading program
- ☒ How to put into place an effective system of assessment for diagnostics, progress monitoring, and end-of-year outcomes
- ☒ How to prepare a leadership team at the school level focused on instructional improvement
- ☒ How to organize teacher grade level teams to work collaboratively for student achievement
- ☒ How to select and effectively utilize reading coaches and content experts

- ☑ How to develop coherence within the classroom and across the grade level for meeting the needs of all students with a common reading program
- ☑ How to select and work with professional development providers for years one through three
- ☑ How to network with other Reading First LEAs to share resources and expertise.

The centers will also offer special workshops customized to the specific needs of the LEAs. For example, an LEA may need training on:

- ☑ How to use the State Recommended Assessments
- ☑ How to use the State Provided Unit Skill Assessments for state-adopted reading/language arts programs
- ☑ How to meet end-of-year internal evaluation reporting needs
- ☑ How to provide on-going instructional support to all teachers
- ☑ How to develop district/school leadership roles and functions to support implementation and quality management support for commitment, planning, evaluating, decision-making, and sustaining the efforts

The Centers will also seek to link reading and reading program experts with LEA leadership teams and schools, upon request, especially when LEAs are seeking solutions for improving student achievement at particular grade levels or in specific schools.

Reading First Technical Assistance Centers are funded by the California Reading First grant and therefore, funded LEAs will not be charged for their services, unless specialized services are requested that are beyond the scope of the technical assistance services authorized (e.g., to provide the AB 466 and AB 75 professional development programs; to provide special events for an LEA's teachers; to print and distribute the State Unit Skill Assessments for teachers and students).

Please periodically check the Reading First Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/pd/readfirst> for additional and updated Frequently Asked Questions.